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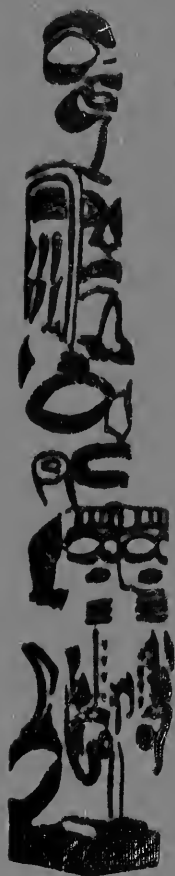
Davis, Carol Beery.

Songs of the totem



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SONGS O F T H E TOTEM



Compiled By
CAROL BEERY DAVIS
JUNEAU, ALASKA



TAKU INDIAN MOTHER

SONGS OF THE TOTEM

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JUNEAU, ALASKA

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REV. A. P. KASHEVAROFF

Curator of the Alaska Territorial Museum
without whose able assistance and un-
flagging interest this collection would
have been impossible.

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SONGS OF THE TOTEM

These are wild, haunting bits of Indian music which will be stilled when this generation passes on. Songs of the Thlingets of Southeastern Alaska, hitherto unwritten, which have, for untold generations, been passed from the lips of father to son. They are as characteristic of these wilderness people as are the carved and painted totem poles by which they are known throughout the world.

But the totems are crumbling now, and the young, educated Thlinget of today carves no more. Likewise, he has put aside the tom-tom of his forefathers for the white man's jazz and the glittering saxophone.

These Songs of the Totem, then, are the only written record of those weird, stilted measures which interpret in music the stolid, carven grandeur of old totems still standing guard over those deserted Thlinget villages which have escaped the ravages of the white curio hunter.

FESTIVE DANCE-SONG



(Fig. No. 1)

Yas kana Thlixva yas ka na ay- a ya -

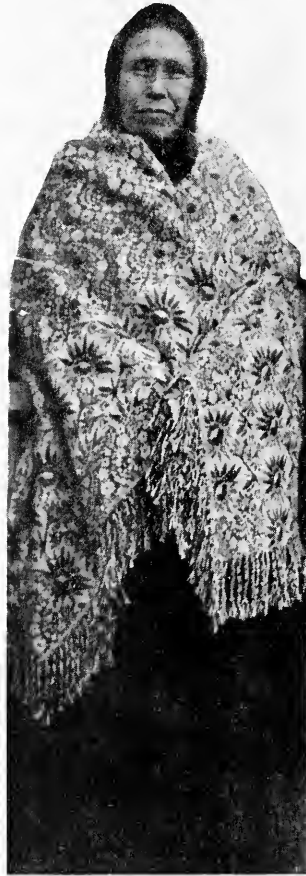
Shishkana Thlixva Ti Tes ka na ay - a ya - .

The festive dance-song of the Thlingets is a song without words; a succession of meaningless syllables corresponding to our tra la la. But the rhythm is so marked and the air so gay and exhilarating that even the most heavy-footed are lured into joining the energetic, whirling dancers.



GROUP OF NATIVES IN TRIBAL DRESS WITH DRUMS

THE TOM-TOM SONG



SITKA MARY
SAVIOR OF SITKA WHITES

The tom-tom song was originally sung to us by Mary Thlantich, known as "Sitka Mary," who was pensioned by the U. S. Government for saving the white people of Sitka from massacre in 1879. Following is an excerpt from House Joint Resolution No. 5, Laws of Alaska 1925, detailing her heroism:

"In 1877 the U. S. Government removed its troops from Sitka and other towns of Alaska. For two years following there were no Government representative there outside of the Collector of Customs. The Indians, smarting under imaginary wrongs, deemed it a very opportune time to assert their independence and settle certain scores. For the loss of six Indians drowned in the Bering Sea during a storm, Katlean and his clan demanded pay. As no pay was to be had, in reprisal they openly threatened the lives of six white people. These threats were not idle, as nightly councils were held by the Indians to perfect the mode of attack upon the white population. Mary Thlantich, who was then married to Michael Travers, an ex-soldier, kept the white people informed as to the intention of the Indians. She was ever the friend of the white citizens of Sitka. The white people took what precaution they could. The women and children were gathered together and housed in the two largest buildings at Sitka and an armed guard was maintained day and night.

"Mary Thlantich carried her very life in her hands when she boldly braved the Indians by attending the last night-council, where no women were ever allowed to be present. She explained to the assembled chiefs and warriors that were they to carry out their intention of killing the white people, grave results to the Indians would follow at the hands of the U. S. Government. However, in spite of her warning an attempt was actually made to enter the town at night. Luckily a friendly clan frustrated this attempt. In keeping the white citizens informed of the impending peril and by delaying the Indians from carrying out their intention long enough to allow the British gunboat to reach Sitka, there is no doubt that the lives of scores of white women and children were saved by the efforts of this brave woman."

She was about 78 years old at the time we secured this song and we reproduce it in the exact key of her rendition.

TOM-TOM SONG

There was a man who went out in his canoe with his dog. The canoe upset. His dog saved him, but when he reached the shore he killed and skinned his dog and used the skin to make a hat. The Land Otter came and wanted to take him (according to belief the Land Otter claimed all drowned persons) but he hypnotized it with his hat, and went to meet the Land Otter People who came out of the water. He picked up their paddles and hung them over his fire. The paddles made sounds and began to come to life, and became minks.

Commemorating the incidents of the foregoing legend, the Tom-Tom Song was composed.

TOM-TOM SONG



(Fig. No. 2)

Gau ayatakh, Gau ayatakh. Kakhetanuku.
Gau Ayatakh, Gau ayatakh.

Gankhwasukhuwu. Gau ayatakh, Gau ayatakh.
Uthligau. Gau ayatakh.

LITERAL TRANSLATION

"This is the drum I retrieved to shore. This is the shell of the Spider Crab."

FREE TRANSLATION

"This the drum is, this the drum is, made from the shell, the spider crab's shell, the shell I retrieved to shore."

PICNIC SONG



(Fig. No. 3)

**Axshakeni ayax-yati Thluxnaxati yatxi kua
axkina tax cha-a xat thlatin.**

LITERAL TRANSLATION

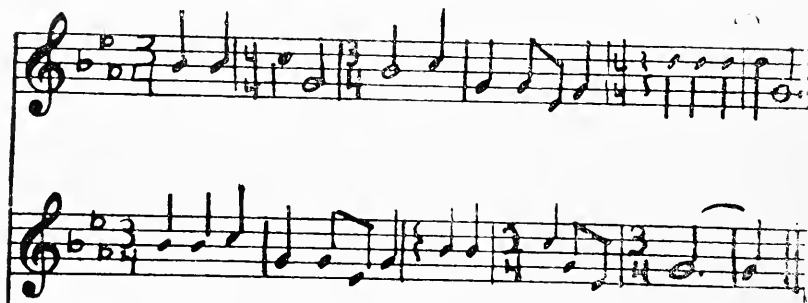
Look down upon me, Thluxnaxati children; he is above me he
looks down upon me.

FREE TRANSLATION

You sly Crow, you peep from above.
Spying me, the Wolf, making love,
Watching how my sweetheart I love.

This is the Thlingets most humorous song. The idea that the crow is peeping down upon the wolf, who is presumably making love, creates much laughter among the singers. It is sung with abandon and merriment and is typically Thlingit in form.

CHILKAT CANOE LOVE SONG



(Fig. No. 4)

Nau kwut yakayakh shaiti khukhikh (xuxix)
iyakagi Khatka-a

Iyatki (Iyatxi) Yanketatsande.

LITERAL TRANSLATION

Like an intoxicated man your word never comes true. Hatka
ye Yatki, just keep quiet now.

FREE TRANSLATION

Vain are your words, as a man drunk with wine,
Hatka Yatka.
Close your false lips henceforth then;
forget to speak again.

BABY GIRL'S LULLABY



(Fig. No. 5)

I-sik, i-sik, i-sik, yethl Ax xin i?sik a-Ya ta.

LITERAL TRANSLATION

Your daughter, your daughter, your daughter, O Crow,
I believe I am your daughter.

FREE TRANSLATION

O Crow, I am your daughter, your baby daughter,
I am your wee girl, your baby girl, O Crow.

This is an infant's lullaby familiar to all Thlingets. Particular attention is called to the changes in tempo.

BOY'S LULLABY



(Fig. No. 6)

Tshatluxa tsake, tshatluxa tsake kautli-i-chi
etsa-tsi-tlen

Eku-shi-tla tuxwat tlikax. Ta-ya xa na xi xi.

LITERAL TRANSLATION

I was just sneaking, fly up (that) big bird, he was thick with
feathers.

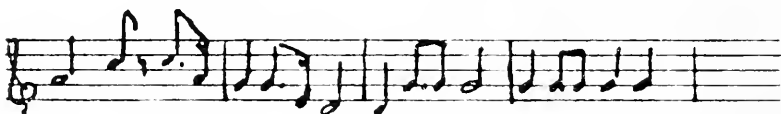
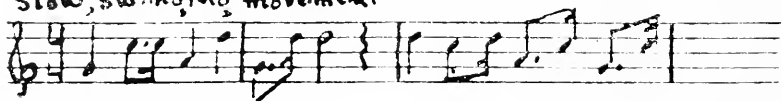
FREE TRANSLATION

I was just sneaking, sneaking to catch that
Great, big, fat bird,
But he flew before I reached him,
Ruffling his feathers all about him.
Yes, he flew high,
Soaring upward into the sky,
Ruffling his feathers all about him.

This lullaby is accompanied by a measured, drum-like thumping of the foot on the second and fourth counts of each measure in a fast, happy tempo, which, to us, would be more conducive to gaiety than to sleep.

GIRL'S LULLABY

Slow, swinging movement



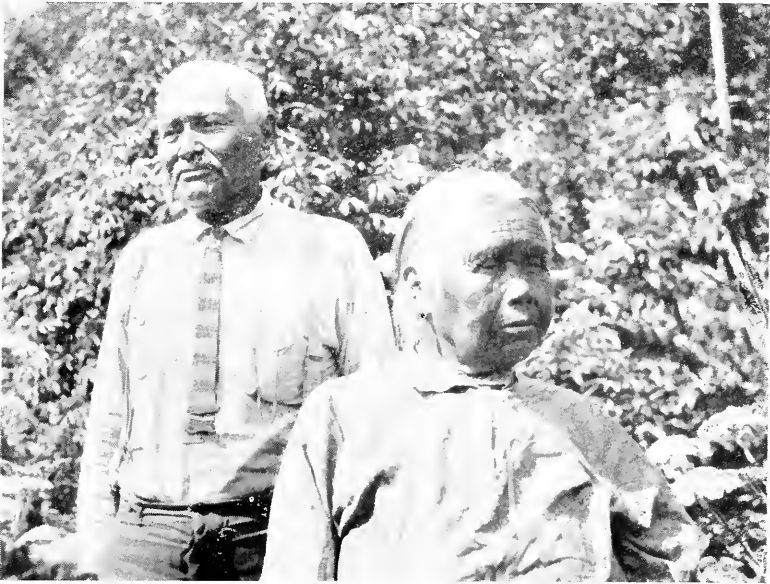
(Fig. No. 7)

**Te atuxun axaniix shaksani tsu xutaxa va shkuxataxich
axchikagati i ya kanititsuk kusane kukasain ah ish kess
akuxlashish.**

LITERAL TRANSLATION

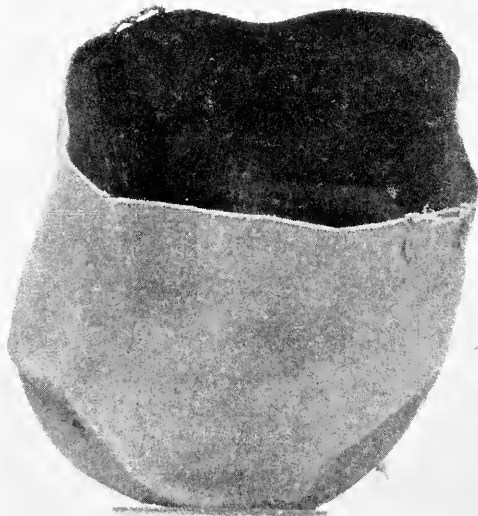
We are going to pack up and go with girls to pick berries for
Father and he is going to eat them with a big spoon.

This girl's lullaby was very difficult to verify. The melody possessing a graceful trend, we were especially desirous of hearing it sung several times for accuracy, but it seemed that few were acquainted with it. Finally, at a gathering of Thlingets, two Indians began to hum it. Unfortunately and inopportunately, the writer turned and addressed the singers with "That's just the one I want!" No sooner were the words spoken than we realized the mistake, for immediately the singers withdrew and no amount of wheedling or coaxing would induce them to sing again.



NATIVES WHO SING THIS SONG

After some time, one Indian reappeared and announced to Father Kashevaroff, our interpreters; and also Curator of the Territorial Museum of Alaska, that he would sing us this song if the Historical Association would purchase a very old basket from him, which had been handed down five generations.



A COPY OF THE BASKET WE HAD TO BUY

This basket, plain brown, 20 inches across the top, 24 inches across the bottom and 23 inches high, is one of the very oldest baskets of split spruce root and was called the Mother Basket, being the largest of all. In July, during the berry season, canoes, gaily decorated, came in loaded with berries.

A berry ceremonial followed when the berries were mixed together in this basket. Around this, feasting and dancing took place, the participants banqueting from the basket.

In the course of time, the basket, really valuable as an heirloom, was bought, and quite soon after the writer received word that the song would now be rendered for her. The appointment was faithfully and conscientiously kept. This lullaby we think to be one of the prettiest of the Thlinget tunes.



STUDY OF A MEDICINE MAN

MEDICINE MAN'S SONG



(Fig. No. 8)

Teskwoch tesitin khat (xat) Ikhtisak. o-ya i-ya khi (xi).

LITERAL TRANSLATION

You have already seen me that I can be a doctor.

FREE TRANSLATION

Behold me! You know who I am!
You know I'm your Medicine Man!

Medicine men allowed neither scissors nor comb to come in contact with their matted locks, giving them a disgusting appearance.

At the close of this short tune, the singer threw himself into a frenzied fit of contortions, with shaking arms thrown out and horrible facial grimaces. We, the witnesses, thought the man was stricken with death but discovered it was merely the Medicine Man's way of invoking the Spirit Power.

This Hoonah Doctor's recitative illustrates the use of the peculiar elastic 5/4 accompaniment to a 3/4 time, the dots beneath representing the shaking of the rattle or the tapping of foot.

MEMORIAL SONG



(Fig. No. 9)

Chusta-kashuxetl tawu-ututse-xin anni yatxi
 yex tcha yaxtu-nastich ax kik. Tsu tatususa
 ke thlex ukukwaxhin ax-kik te-xan katunik
 uxuwutlixach.

LITERAL TRANSLATION

I have to fulfill like the high caste chief that broke the thunder bird's feather. That way I think of my brother. Why I don't believe my brother someone told me. I give up.

This Memorial Song is the only one of the Thlingit melodies thus far discovered with an introduction. The introduction consists of the first four measures, which are hummed dramatically,

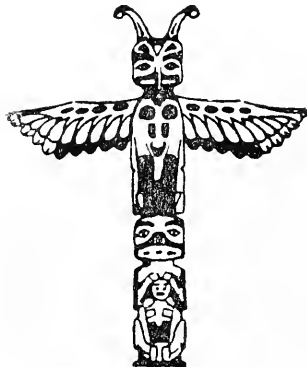
producing an atmosphere of disaster. In fact, the whole song is rendered with dramatic feeling. To understand the meaning of it, one must know the legend of the breaking of the "Thunder Bird's feather which is included in the one word **chushtakashu**, which in itself means, "The cause of his death is stepping on the feather." The legend follows:

One time three brothers of high caste were walking. The youngest one of them stepped on a thunder bird's feather by accident. Immediately he dropped dead. This was so unexpected that his people had never forgotten the event.

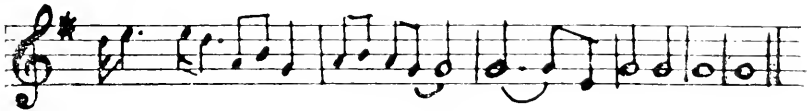
The composer of the song was a woman whose son died suddenly. The song means: "It seems to me that my son died the same way as the high caste one who stepped on the thunder bird's feather and died immediately. That is the way my son is dead."

BURIAL SONG

When a high caste person died the whole village closed down. There was no noise; no children were allowed to play. Everybody paid respect to the dead person with absolute quiet. The first evening after death, the corpse was placed in state in a sitting position, with big head gears, Chilkat blankets and black beaded blankets, with all the earthly treasures the deceased possessed surrounding him. Mourners stood about in a semi-circle, with tall sticks, chanting and wailing. The body was then taken out and burned. Then the ashes were put in wooden boxes. A big totem was erected, inside of which were placed the ashes. The totem was elaborately carved by experts, who received from two to three hundred blankets as compensation. Good carvers were rare in those days and today the art is completely lost.



BURIAL SONG



(Fig. No. 10)

**Kaki tuwuti xuch iwuwu yexax tunastich ax kik.
Chit ashutlixik ax kaki hass wutiyet.**

LITERAL TRANSLATION

He has taken the last portion of his food. That's the way I
think of my brother.

Death has finished with my brother. What a catastrophe!

FREE TRANSLATION

He has touched the last of his food!
He has partaken the last portion of his food!
Oh, my brother, my brother.

(Second Verse)

Death has won his race, O Brother!
Death triumphed o'er you. What a tragic, fatal end!
Oh, my brother, my brother!

LOVE SONG



(Fig. No. 11)

Si-ku Woo-natcha ieykisanee Kiksatee Yathi
ya na yeno ee Yelli-tin kek-kiyat.

Yande hin ka-at akh kayakh ush-hin i tayu
tutank

Tlukhnakhati Yatkhi ee Elli ch-kha achi-it
kanda kakhch.

Tlakh-kha kunanach tsu wey Katchilhaych
tu siku.

LITERAL TRANSLATION

Glad to die, we will do this Kiksatee children.
Your Raven with go up.
When it's getting dark I get lonesome.
Thlukhnahatee children, you raven you,
start crying from this.
Why are you broken hearted? Why don't
you be happy?

This love song, or "Bridal Song," as it is called, is rendered in the most dramatic style of any that the writer heard—with strong accent on the tones designated, under apparently powerful emotion. The breath is cut short at the end of each phrase.

PEACE SONG—KUWAKAN



(Fig. No. 12)

Ash-in yukaxla kek tu-ani sheyate ethl tu
kuchich Yukuthla kek ah xoy ya axa.

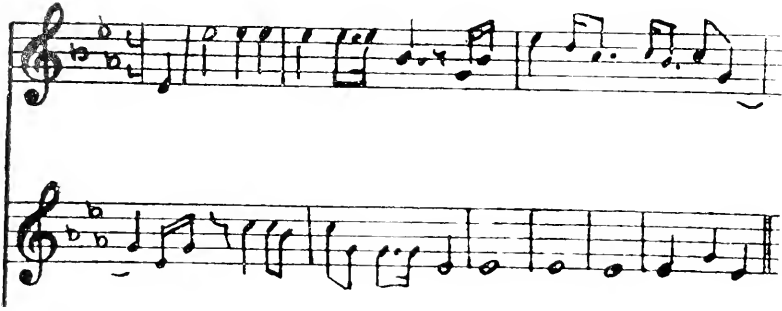
A ta-te anastak i kuchi she-ye te ethl thlingit
ann-yit An kathl kin.

LITERAL TRANSLATION

He is going around his country when he thinks of his raven
with his wolf going around. Put thoughts in this head, you Wolf,
Raven, so you can see everything in the world.

A poetic thought is revealed in the following.

PEACE SONG—KHAT KUWAKAN



(Fig. No. 13)

**Yak-kak khi-nin tuwati tu-tuwn she-ya-ti-yelh
attakh tliyen Kakh tustinch.**

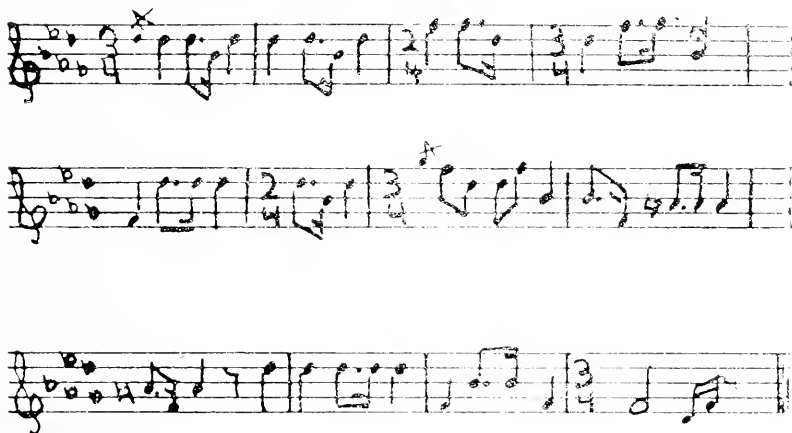
LITERAL TRANSLATION

(Wolf singing to Raven): In the middle of the ocean the Wolf's soul (hurt feelings) is dropped and, Mr. Raven, you will see the soul no more.

FREE TRANSLATION

Deep 'neath the ocean's waters, Raven,
I fling my hurt soul's grievance,
Where it ne'er will trouble more
This wolf and you, Raven.

CANOE LOVE SONG—CROW



(Fig. No. 14)

Takwat sawey akat khaiti tann shayada yelli
Tukhuni yelh sakhan tuwute thliyade shayaysata.

LITERAL TRANSLATION

Why do you give me such proud talk, Mr. Crow?
You love a Crow, like yourself. That's why
I want you to turn your head away from me.

FREE TRANSLATION

And now, Mr. Crow, why such proud talk?
You love a crow like yourself.
That's why I say "look away!"
Disgrace it would but be
If you courted me, Mr. Crow:
So that's why I say "Just look away," O Crow.

The Thlingets greatly opposed intermarriage among members of one tribe. It was strictly forbidden and considered a disgrace. A "Wolf" must marry a "Raven," and vice-versa. We have a canoe love song of the "Crow" resulting from his law.

GAME SONGS

GOOSE GAME



(Fig. No. 15)

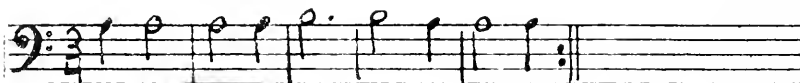
**Kxe you kxe you sha tawak-ke, Kxe you kxe
you sha tawak-ke ah ah ah ah.**

LITERAL TRANSLATION

The woman's goose! The woman's goose! Ah, ah, ah, ah!

The Goose Game was played by the Thlinget children, who sang this song with their arms flying in imitation of the wings of a goose. The words, so far as we can ascertain, merely exclaim, "The woman's goose! The woman's goose!"

CIRCLE GAME



(Fig. No. 16)

Atat a tsiki-yot.

LITERAL TRANSLATION

Come together all in one (until circle closes).

The second game song was played by having a chain of children, with left hands joined, wind gradually around the leader, in this fashion:



POTLATCHES

There were several occasions for the giving of Potlatches among the Thlingets. There was the Potlatch for gaining rank, or the name of a dead relative; the Potlatch for building a community house (when the opposite clan built for a fraternity and a Potlatch was given, at which time workmen were paid); the Peace Potlatch; the Social Potlatch, and the Memorial Potlatch.

A Memorial Potlatch was a feast given in memorial for some big chief or high caste person who had been dead five or six years. His tribe, or the relatives of the deceased, invited in his honor the relatives of his wife, her uncle, brothers, etc.

When one chief invited people of another clan he also invited the other chief, and vice-versa. The two sides danced different dances. It was just one good, big time of dancing and eating, continuing for about four days.

Toward the close of the Potlatch the chief gave out thousands of presents, blankets, etc., and was absolutely "broke" when he finished. All guests received gifts. Many relatives of the chief also came to his aid, bringing gifts to the visitors.

In 1903 at the Chilkat Potlatch, the chief gave away \$1500.00 in cash and \$700.00 worth of very good wool blankets, white with black borders, such as are seldom seen, from British Columbia.

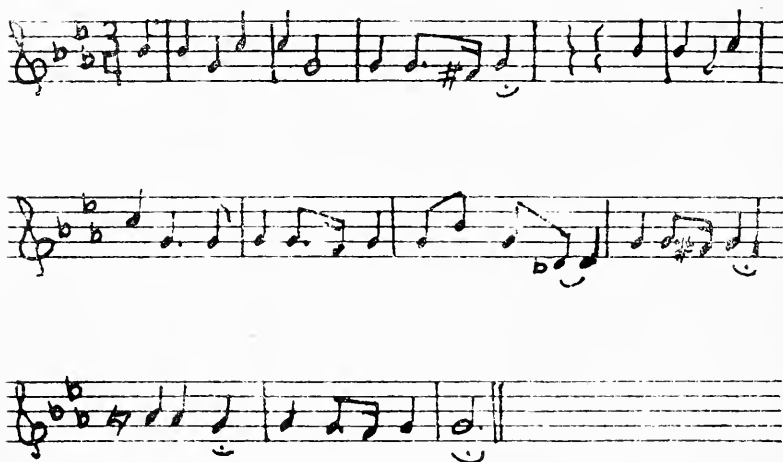
The Potlatch dances are grotesque, distinctive and impressive, each gorgeous costume representing something different. Many of the dancers paint their faces in black and red and on their heads wear elaborately carved crowns and head pieces made of wood, inlaid with shells. Feathers seem to be an important part of their dress. Some of the dancers fill the space between the headgear with down and small feathers which fly about them as they jump around. Their leaping about becomes more and more fantastic and vigorous, swaying and bending, kneeling and prancing, their heads thrown backward and forward, until the feathers in the head are all showered out about them.

The following Peace Potlatch dancers were given in Juneau the winter of 1928, carefully directed by the oldest song leaders of the Thlingets in this locality.



CHILKAT INDIAN POTLATCH DANCERS

CHILKAT CANOE LOVE SONG



(Fig. No. 18)

Chu-woo-tu-Kakh Ke-ka-Khatee- Takla weai
yatke tsu-wande ye Koo-Kashki te ayagileh.

LITERAL TRANSLATION

Best peace together, Taklewedi children. You know this
world will get dark, so we are to be in friendship.



INDIAN CANOE

FREE TRANSLATION

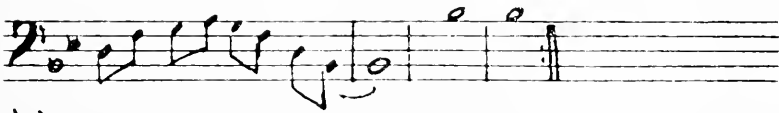
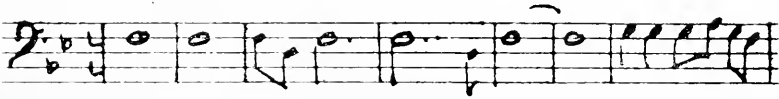
Sweet understanding with just us two,
 Perfect contentment when I'm with you.
 Tho' twilight creeps where shadows fall,
 Together we are all in all.

The melody and rhythm of this canoe love song are the most beautiful and haunting of any of the Thlinget tunes.

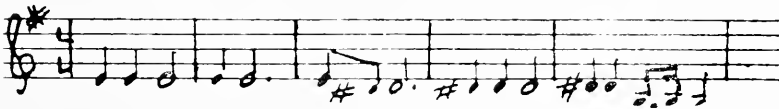
INTERIOR DANCE

Kuana-Ayon

(a)



(b)

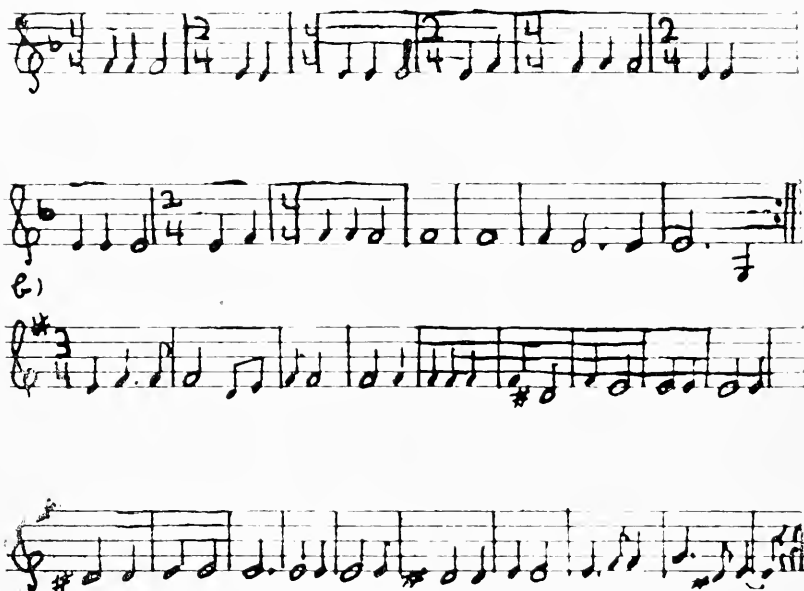


(Fig. No. 19)

There are two parts to this dance, the second immediately following the first.

The Interior Indians are those from the Copper and Yukon Rivers; in fact, most of the Interior of Alaska. They are called "Kuana" and are divided into clans, as are those along the coast, one clan of the Kuana being the "Ayon." The Chilkat Indians went into the interior to trade with these natives, learned songs and dances, and brought them back with them. From Chilkat they spread all over Southeastern Alaska.

SIMPISHIAN DANCE

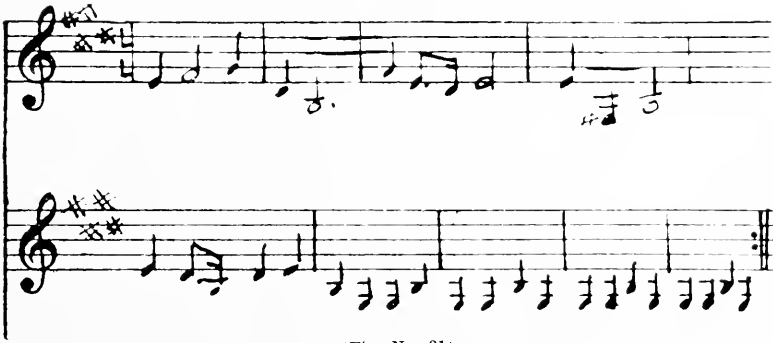


(Fig. No. 20)

Decorated paddles are used in this dance. The dancers enter one by one, each dancer being so introduced as to give all a chance to become individually famous. In this dance there is no central figure.

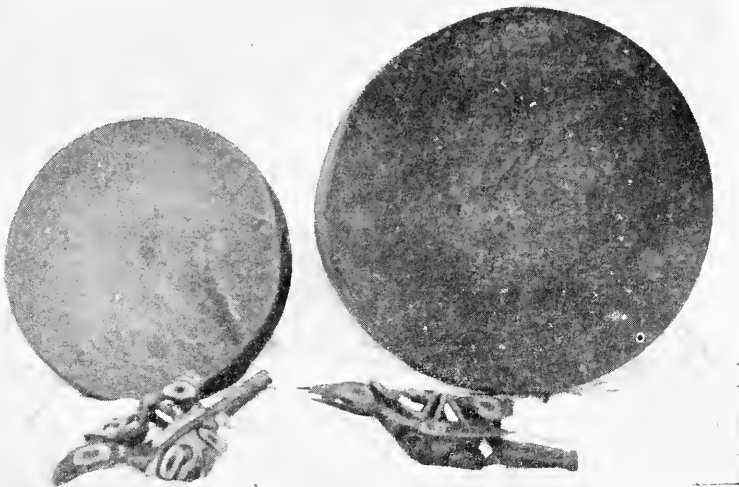
The Natives of this coast learned the Simpshian Dance from the Metlakatla people—to whom it belongs—while away south trading. The Simpshian Dance has a most alluring rhythm, and is divided into two parts, as has been said—the Entrance and the Dance proper, the music of the latter attractively changing tempo.

SPIRIT DANCE



(Fig. No. 21)

The Spirit Dance is performed for many different occasions; as a token of respect for visitors, or for any festival purpose. It is a Ghost Dance, originated by the medicine man. It is characterized always by the unusual 5 beats to a measure, be it a 3/4 or 4/4 tempo. The beats are slow at first, then accelerating; the time being kept by rattles.



INDIAN RATTLES

PEACE DANCE

The Peace Dance, sometimes erroneously called the War Dance, is the one used for establishing peace—given as a sign of truce, as it were. After the trouble, the chiefs come to an agreement, and there on the battle field they choose the peace dancers.

These dancers are people of the best characters, the high caste people of the clans, but not necessarily the best dancers. One at a time is chosen from each side and every two must be on the same plane, or level, or have the same social standing. There may be two, four, six, even ten, on each side, according to the magnitude of the trouble. These dancers are called "Kuakan," meaning "Deer." They are named for this animal because he is the most peaceful of all, receiving abuse without any attempt at retaliation.

The dancers come in, one by one, to a very fast tune. The first side enters in the apparel worn on the battlefield, with the addition, only, of a strap around each dancer to designate sincerity. In like manner the other side dances its response.

Upon completion of this, the first part of the Peace Dance, the battle garb is discarded and the dancers don representative costumes. As the dance progresses, each side produces a solo dancer, who is supported by the rest.

We have now finished two parts of the Peace Dance. The number of parts differ, but there may never be more than four. Several days may be necessary to conclude it.

In the Kuakan the individual dancers receive the names of a bird or animal, which they faithfully imitate in their dance. In this case it was a salmon. The dancer had a little fish on the top of his head and he acted like a salmon jumping, mostly assuming a stooping position.

PEACE DANCE—NUSKITANI



(Fig. No. 22)

Tene lxxasxe chawutiken kojwantane yatxi
tuwu atakaitan

Ka chin eax -a- kautixa wushkitane yatxi
tuwu tlewshxetl.

LITERAL TRANSLATION

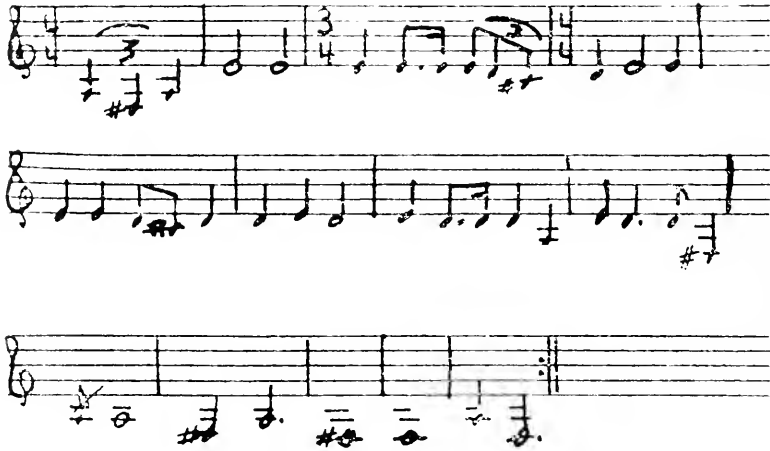
Flying in, kokwantane children, catch it (the spirit).

It disappeared from the hand, Wushkitane children. The
spirit. How unfortunate!



TOM-TOM (BACKGROUND BLOCKED OUT)

SALMON PEACE DANCE



(Fig. No. 23)

Tak susawe- ma at ya i-ye-aka a chaus i yeth!-i
 Kokwan tane yatxi i-ani Kanan ra kilkwatanch.

LITERAL TRANSLATION

Why are you making excuses, you Ravens?
 Fish will jump in front of your town.

HYDAH DANCE



(Fig. No. 24)

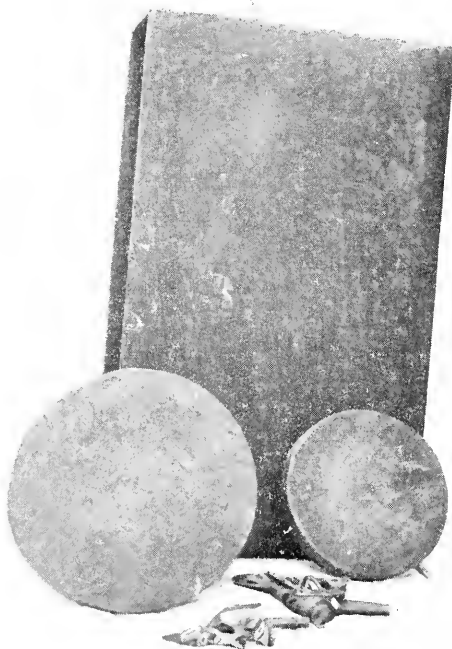
Nana ne akaxkuxte cha-a thlinedi yatxi azte
tane yatxi utu yu taate.

LITERAL TRANSLATION

When I die, will I get alive again for this modern life?
When Thlinedi children and Dipper children will be reunited.

INSTRUMENTS OF ACCOMPANIMENT

The chief instruments of accompaniment used by the Thlinget Indians are the drum, tom-tom and rattle.



RECTANGULAR DRUM (BACKGROUND BLOCKED OUT)

The rectangular drum is constructed of one continuous plank. At what is to be the corners, the board is cut or trimmed in to the edge to make it thin and pliable. Then it is steamed and bent and sustained at the corners by root fibre pegs or, in the more modern drums, by nails. There are various sizes of drums, but the one in the Territorial Museum in Juneau (from Wrangell) measures 43 inches long, 26 inches wide and 11 inches deep. There are different figures painted on the drums, such as the Thunder Bird, Whale Killer, or Eagle, according to the clan possessing it. The red and black paint used in olden times was natural and indelible, derived from ground matter and black rock. Modern paints later took the place of the old. The drum is struck with a stick upon which is bound a hard ball of compressed rags, which produces a raw, hollow, far-reaching tone.



BIG RATTLE

The tom-tom is made by stretching moose hide about a round piece of spruce which has been steamed and bent. There are several sizes, but the usual ones measure 18 inches in diameter with a depth of two and three-fourths inches, or 13 inches in diameter with a depth of two inches.

The rattle reaches its height in variety, symbolism, artistry and perfection among the Thlingets. "A curious rattle of the Thlingets is of wood carved in the figure of a bird. Above the head of the bird is a human face with the tongue protruding, and the end of the tongue touches the tongue of a frog. This is said to indicate that the medicine man who owns the rattle absorbs from a frog the poison with which he can work evil upon the people. The decorated rattles of this region present a bewildering variety. Some are in the form of a bird about fourteen inches long, the tail of the bird forming the handle of the rattle; others have two human faces carved on the two sides of the rattle, one sad and the other smiling, suggesting the face of the patient before and after treatment by the medicine man."*

*From "The American Indians and Their Music." by Francis Densmore.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MUSIC OF THE THLINGET INDIANS OF SOUTHEAST ALASKA

The Thlinget race inhabits Alaska from Katalla to Dixon's Entrance. There are two tribes in the Thlinget race, both speaking one tongue, the Wolf (or Kootch) and the Raven (or Yethl). There are three or four clans in each tribe, and each clan has song composers, each one of whom may have fifteen or twenty songs to his credit. We hear only the most popular songs, because they are the ones used by the majority of the natives, but there are two or three hundred in all.

The younger generations are decidedly apt in music, readily grasping present-day harmony and tunes and quickly adapting them to their needs, but the primitive melodies of the Indians of Alaska are rapidly becoming extinct. They are retained only by the very aged ones, or those who have not acquired the English language or modern civilization to any extent, and these oldsters are rapidly being claimed by age and disease. In fact, during the compilation of these songs several of our dependable singers have passed on, and it will be only a matter of a few years until the old fragments will be forgotten. What tribal music has descended to the younger generations has been mixed with popular themes and therefore is not authentic. In Southeastern Alaska, the previously presented old-time Potlatches, which tended to keep alive ancient customs, dances and tunes, have been discouraged because of disorder resulting from them.

Intervals

The music of the Thlinget Indians is characterized by an absolute lack of knowledge of the scale as we know it, as at no time have we found more than three consecutive tones, or an appreciable portion of the scale employed. However, we note particularly the recurrent use of monotones and of intervals of thirds, fifths and octaves, which the Thlinget seems to hold firmly in his mind. From these we derive the key-note, although many of the melodies wander so that it is difficult to find a key-note in our sense of the term.

Frances Densmore in "The American Indians and Their Music" says, "There are many instances in which a key is established, in our sense of the term, and others in which the tones of a key are present, but their sequence is not such as fully to

establish the key." This is also very true of the Thlinget Indian music. There is the almost invariable minor third drop at the end of the melody. Many motifs start with real promise for two or more measures, but, as the 'trails' of Kipling 'run out and stop,' they hopelessly abandon it sooner or later in a monotone held for several measures.

It is odd to note that a tune begins on the octave, fifth or dominant of the scale, with the progressions generally downward thereafter. Again we can say of the Thlinget music the same as Frances Densmore concludes of other American Indian music, "The most apparent characteristic of Indian songs is a descending trend." Sometimes the melody descends steadily from the first note to the last; and sometimes there is an ascent in the middle of the song, after which it resumes its downward trend. "Not all songs are made after this pattern, but it is a respect in which Indian songs differ from our own." Thlinget tunes, significant of a vanishing race, seem to end with a question, as if reflecting their lives. Do these Indians, no matter how purposeful at first, sense the futility of competition with civilization and gradually weaken and seem to wonder "wherefore born?"

Pitch

We, of the present age, are so accustomed to our melodies beginning and ending on a tone of the tonic chord that we are surprised at the frequency with which these primitive ones begin and end on an irrelevant tone (Fig. 2). Possibly this may be due to uncertainty of pitch, although no difficulty is experienced in ascertaining the exact pitch for different tunes as, at each rendition, the same tune will be pitched approximately the same. If a tune is pitched decidedly higher or lower, or in a totally different register, it is not recognized by the Thlinget Indian at all unless the words are repeated, upon which he will immediately pitch it in its usual range. Therefore, we conclude that these irregularities are deliberate rather than accidental. The Thlinget Indian abhors the piano and forcefully remonstrates against his own tune being reproduced upon it, the tone quality being so unlike his own grunting sounds. To quote Frances Densmore once again: "All who are familiar with Indian music will admit that it loses its native character when played on a piano. An Indian may sing a tone of the same pitch as the piano but his manner of producing the tone and of passing from one tone to another is such that it cannot be imitated on any keyed instrument."

Length

The usual length of a motive is twelve measures; though often we find nine and eleven, and occasionally six. Being educated to the eight and sixteen measure period, we feel an absence of balance.

Major and Minor Keys

As is characteristic of music of other uncultured peoples, the Thlingets partiality for the minor keys is quite marked, although to us their use is reversed. Their "Festive Dance" (Fig. 1) and "Picnic Song" (Fig. 3) are in the minor, while the "Burial Song" (Fig. 10), lullabies and dramatic love songs are in the major key, yet with a minor atmosphere. Lullabies, which we would expect to be slow and quiet, are lively and punctuated with a pronounced trotting of the knee or tapping of the foot. In fact, unconsciously, the Thlingets pantomime their singing with bodily movements and facial expressions so completely that the meaning is pretty nearly conveyed even if one does not understand their words. In the absence of a tom-tom, rhythm is maintained by the foot, body, rattles or sticks.

Tempo

The most natural tempo seems to be the 4/4, or common time. However, a disregard of regular rhythm is very apparent, as often a change to 3/4 or 2/4 time is made suddenly for one measure only. (Figs. 4 and 5). Yet we hear five tatoos beat to three notes sung in perfect time with surprising ease in the "Medicine Man's Song," a 5/4 accompaniment to a 3/4 theme. (Fig. 8). Also in the "Spirit Dance" (Fig. 21), we find a 5/4 accompaniment to a 4/4 theme, a special eccentricity of any of their melodies concerning "spirits" or the intangible.

Rattles form the chief rhythmic background for the 5/4 tempo, which has considerable elasticity in it, generally gradually accelerating. The writer has noticed frequently that, even in the simpler forms of rhythm, the Thlinget Indians carry two parallel rhythms at the same time—one with the voice, the other with the drum, foot or rattle—carelessly independent of each other, regardless of whether or not the principal accents coincide. After the listener becomes accustomed to this, it has a certain charm. Their dance tunes have the most distinct rhythms of any.

Song Substance

Intimacy with nature is embodied in the Thlinget music to a very marked degree. Their songs express their everyday life with the birds, animals and vegetation of land and sea, each of which has some special significance to the tribes and strong influence over them. For instance, in (Fig. 9), we have a mother's memorial song to her son who died suddenly, with the comparison to the legend of the breaking of the Thunder Bird's feather. Again, in (Fig. 2), the "Tom-Tom Song," we have this translation: "This is the drum I retrieved to shore. This is the shell of the spider crab" composed out of a legend. In (Fig. 6), the "Boy's Lullaby," we find this idea: "I was just sneaking around to catch that big bird, but he flew up before I reached him, ruffling his feathers all about him." In (Fig. 5), "The Baby Girl's Lullaby," we see the personification of the raven in the words, "Behold, your baby daughter, Mr. Crow." In (Fig. 7) we have the words, "We are going to pack up with the girls to go out to pick berries for Father to eat with a big spoon." The thought expressed is simple, and the words are few. Indeed many Thlinget tunes have no words outside of meaningless syllables, as is the case in the "Festive Dance" (Fig 1).

Manner of Singing

The Thlinget Indian generally hums a monotone or so to place his key, then begins the tune itself. He makes a poor soloist and when heard alone seems to grunt the throaty tones, many of which are untrue and hard to analyze; but collectively, the Thlingets gain inspiration—the melody standing out more distinctly and taking real life, although the quality of the Indian voice seems different from the white man's.

They sing their melodies in unison, the women usually an octave higher than the men. Sometimes the women carry a monotone exactly a seventh from the apparent key tone, causing a pronounced discord, which becomes louder and more persistent as the song proceeds. The stronger the discord, the more zest to the song, seemingly. They have no introduction to their songs or interludes between verses such as we, but hum the entire tune through once before applying the words. Generally there are two verses, sometimes three, and occasionally only one.

Authencity

These songs were tested by having the same singer render them at different times, by hearing the versions of different singers, and finally the rendition of the same from those from other localities. The rhythm was repeated more exactly than the melody, the latter showing occasional unimportant changes, many times in the number of phrases at the close. The same has been the experience of those recording the music of the Indians of the Plains.

Expense of Collection

It was necessary to pay for these tunes, according to how vital they were to the hearts of the singers. The Thlinget Indians are whimsical and reticent, even crafty. In many cases great diplomacy was required to induce them to sing, special interest being taken in something with which they were concerned; or some relic of olden days or trinket had to be bought from them. They tired easily and withheld the song we especially desired until gratified to their own satisfaction.

To us their music, with its very free, though stilted use of such a limited number of notes, has the effect of bareness and weirdness, which seems only the gaunt skeleton of the real. "The theories of civilization cannot catch the native element in the music of primitive peoples."



INDIAN WAR CANOE

Gov. John G. Brady often made the statement that to his knowledge the eldest son of Dr. Eugene S. Willard, was the first all American white child born in the then District of Alaska. The following note to the author is self explanatory:

Carol Beery Davis,
Juneau.
Dear Friend:

I cannot adequately express my gratitude to you for allowing me to hear and read your collections of Thlinget music!

As you know, I learned and spoke the native language before I could speak English. Among the Chilcats many of these pieces were sung to me as an infant and some I grew to love.

As a native born "Kogwonton" I thank you in the name of the race I morally feel is my own, for your splendid achievement in keeping for posterity these bits of our music.

F. EUGENE WILLARD (KA-WISH-TEH)
Lieut. U. S. N. R.

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Davis, Carol Beery.

Songs of the totem

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